

Duxbury Clipper

SECTION

B

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Section B

A Journey Down Surplus Street

PART III: GENERATIONS

In part two of this series we were introduced to a magnificent federal built by Benjamin Bosworth, and learned of the many uses this house has served over three centuries. We also discovered the beauty of the Major Thomas Cape and the enterprises surrounding the property. Now as we journey down Surplus Street, stopping at a pristine white cape, we find a house with more than 180 years of continuous family ownership and a lineage still going strong there today. A pathway can be made of more than just dirt, gravel, and pavement. It can be filled with family genealogies, which once unearthed can inspire us to dig into our own past and the history of our ancestors.

Bradford Holmes House 32 Surplus Street

In 1820, Bradford Holmes, a block maker by trade, purchased from Ahira Wadsworth, a Duxbury merchant, a parcel of land on the north side of what is now known as Surplus Street. He paid \$200 for the 1 1/2 acres, which included a cart way right to the shore. We also know from property deeds

Bartlett. The couple would be blessed with many children. Their son Bathsheba was born in 1803, then Bradford in 1805, Betsey B. in 1807, George B. in 1809, Rufus B. in 1811, Julia in 1813, Ellis in 1816 and their last child, Henry in 1820. It seems incredible now to imagine so many people living in this quaint Cape on Surplus Street.

Misfortune hit home for

ter Julia would also pass away, leaving the young couple with five of their eight children.

Betsey and Bradford lived through these tragedies, finding other events to rejoice in such as the marriage of their daughter Betsey B. to Major Joseph Thomas. Thomas was a veteran of the Mexican War. Holmes purchased a lot not far from his property for the young couple to build their new home. He retained ownership of land, and Thomas built for his new bride a beautiful cape home now located at 14 Surplus Street.

Their son George B. would marry Caroline S. Soule in 1832, and young Rufus would marry a Winsor in 1847.

Tragedy befell the family again though in 1836 when Holmes' wife Betsy died. She was only thirty-four. Holmes remarried three years later to Nancy Houstings, who never had children with Bradford but raised Betsy's children as her own.

As Duxbury's shipbuilding industry began to decline, so too did Holmes' prosperity. The need for block makers dwindled, and Holmes found himself bankrupt. It may have been the end of Holmes' ownership in the property had his son Rufus not had the foresight and financial capabilities to help his father.

Holmes needed \$1500 and



(L-R): Clara Winsor Holmes, age 70; Clara Holmes Graves Cushman, age 45; and Ruby Graves, age 27. Photo taken in 1899.

Photo courtesy of Bea Richards

Rufus wanted to lend the money to his dad, but Bradford Holmes "insisted that was no way to do business, even with a parent, and gave a mortgage" to his son in return for the money, documented Ruby Graves, the granddaughter of Rufus.

Bradford and Nancy

ship in his parent's property.

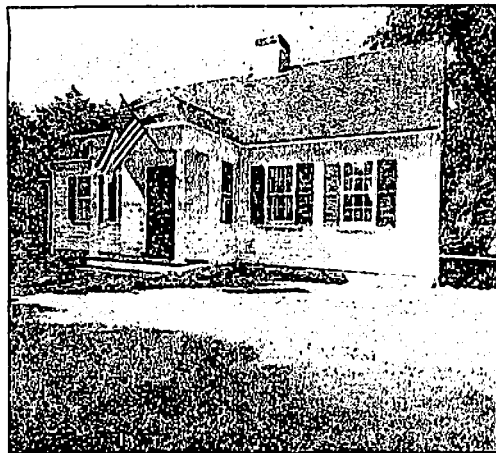
Rufus' stepmother, Nancy, received a dower of the easterly half of the main house, beginning at the front gate going through the house and out the easterly door of the back porch. She resided in her half of the house after her husband's death.

Rufus had worked as a cabin boy at about the age of sixteen, recalled Ruby Graves in 1958. He would spend much of his life at sea. His older brother, Bradford, became a blacksmith. He was not as capable or successful as Rufus and never married. Town records show Bradford living in the Almshouse, located not far from Surplus Street, in 1865.

In 1847, Rufus Holmes married Clara Winsor. He had been engaged to Clara's older sister but she had passed away before the wedding nuptials. So the young man waited for the younger sister, Clara, to "grow up" and married her when he was 36 and she was 18 years old, wrote Ruby Graves.

The couple had two children, Charles Winsor Holmes

continued on page 11



The Bradford Holmes House at 32 Surplus Street.

Photo by Michelle Hutton

that Holmes maintained a workshop on his property.

Holmes' story, however, begins even earlier when in 1802 he married Betsy

the couple, however, in 1814 when their eldest son Bathsheba died at age 11. Then they lost their baby Ellis before he reached his first birthday. In 1824 their daughter



Rufus Holmes

Photo courtesy of Bea Richards

remained in the house after this business arrangement with Rufus. When Bradford passed away in 1859 at the age of 83, Rufus took ownership of "all properties of the deceased" at auction for \$100. His bid along with the note for \$1500 secured his owner-

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A Journey Down Surplus Street: Part III

continued from page one

in 1848 and Clara born 1854. According to Graves, Rufus and Clara first lived in a house at the corner of Washington and Stetson Street, and then moved to the family house on Surplus Street. When Rufus left for the West Coast, Clara moved back with her parents who lived just down the road on the corner of Winsor and Washington Street.

Rufus' career at sea did prove exciting when in 1856, his ship was wrecked on Pitcairn Island. Upon his arrival on the island, he quickly befriended the natives living there.

"The natives were laboriously making a bark cloth called tapa, (and) were using crude wood rollers that were not durable, so Grandfather took pieces of iron from the wrecked ship and made them into rollers to make their work easier," described Graves.

The natives were so pleased with their new iron

to join their enterprise. Sampson kept a diary of their days at Port Angeles and wrote to his father back in Duxbury of how he "had bought in" with Holmes and Winsor and they had their claims in what was to become Port Angeles. "Sampson's father puzzled over the letter, uncertain whether the locale was British or American."

Rufus finally returned to Duxbury in 1865. He had been away from his family for ten years. Clara and Rufus moved back to Surplus Street with their two children, Charles and Clara who were now 17 and 11 years old.

At some point in the 1800s, Rufus allowed the town to build a firehouse for their steam engine on part of his property near where the Stetson House is located on Bumblebee Lane today. The second floor of the firehouse was used as a dance hall.

"When a new fire house was built near the Blue Fish River, Holmes had the old firehouse moved to his house

when only two years into this marriage. Clara was greeted by Martin Hanigan, a brakeman, who had run from the train station on South Station Street to report her husband Nahum had been hurt after falling from the train at the station.

"Almost immediately he returned to Clara to say he was dead," recalled Ruby Graves.

Clara never married again, raising Ruby on her own in the house on Surplus Street. Her brother, Charles or "Uncle Charles" as he became known to many in Duxbury, would live nearby on Washington Street where he boarded at Clara Wadman's house, recalled Bea Richards, a long time resident of Surplus Street who lives across from the Bradford Holmes House.

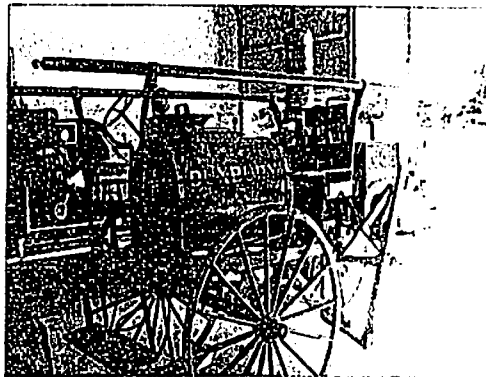
He was considered a real gentleman by the townspeople. His obituary in 1940, was entitled, "Duxbury's tribute to one of its grand old men." He lived a long life, and even towards the end of his years, "one could scarcely realize that he had reached the age of nearly 100 years, for his conversation was as bright and cheerful as when we knew him many years ago," wrote Annie D. Dunham.

Ruby Graves learned a great deal from Uncle Charles. He would be the one to teach Graves how to care for the Cape home her great-grandfather had built for his family.

"She learned from Uncle Charles a set routine of taking care of the house, like one year having the roof checked and the next year having the chimney bricks pointed up," said Bea Richards.

His niece Ruby also became a Duxbury icon of sorts. "She was loved by the entire town, and there is even a room named after her at the Unitarian Church... she was a very good person" noted Barbara Jameson Lawson.

During Lawson's childhood she spent her summers in a house just across the street from Ruby's on Surplus Street. She recalled her daily



A steam fire engine dating to 1905, currently stored at the Duxbury Fire Station.

Photo by Duxbury Clipper

visits to "Miss Ruby," as she fondly called her, as precious moments in her life.

"Miss Ruby would let me play her metal gramophone - an instrument that held me spellbound," added Lawson.

"Ruby was very much a lady and never said a bad thing about anyone," recalled Bea Richards.

Both Lawson and Richards talked of Graves' love of cooking, especially in her summer kitchen, which was attached to the barn at the rear of the house on Surplus Street. Here she baked many delicious items for the Unitarian Fair, which was always a "highlight of the summer," said Lawson.

Ruby Graves as a young woman worked in Boston and met a man she planned to marry. "Her mother Clara did not approve of the man, and so the marriage never happened," said Richards.

Ruby never married and remained living in the house on Surplus Street. A beautiful old photo shows Ruby with her mother Clara and Grandmother Clara Winsor Holmes.

While Ruby never had children of her own, she loved and was adored by more children in town, and so it could be said she was a mother to many. The neighborhood children visited Miss Ruby at her home on Surplus Street often. It was not uncommon for Ruby to take walks with them through the pastures and woods that surrounded her

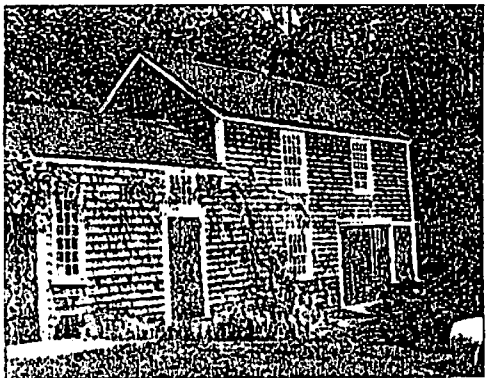
home, and as they walked she told them exciting stories of her grandfather Rufus' life at sea, or pointed out "fascinating facts about the birds and flowers" they came upon.

"My sons would walk home from Sunday school each week and stop at Miss Ruby's to read the funny pages in her paper. They were always allowed to do this as long as they put back the paper exactly as it had been, and they always did," remarked Richards.

One story which Miss Ruby always liked to tell was how she and her housekeeper, Mildred Fratic found cases of preserved rum cherries which her mother had stored at least twenty years earlier in the attic of the house on Surplus Street. The two women didn't dare eat them but instead threw them out in back of the barn. Graves would then add with such excitement "then we had the happiest days in the neighborhood!"

It was important to Graves to have her house remain in the family. Upon her death in 1974 at the age of 101 years, she left the Surplus property to a distant cousin living in Plymouth. Today that cousin's son resides in and maintains the house of many generations.

Next in our series we will visit three houses all built by a family who represented the seafaring class of the 1800s as we journey down one of Duxbury's oldest pathways.



The attached barn was once a fire house and dance hall. It was moved to the Bradford Holmes House in 1877.

Photo by Duxbury Clipper

rollers they gave Rufus a gift of two silver leg bracelets.

"When Grandfather returned to Duxbury he had those 'heaven ornaments' fashioned into two teaspoons marked RHC for Rufus and Clara Holmes," she added.

This Duxbury native, Rufus Holmes, would later be recognized as the first settler of Port Angeles, Washington.

He would remain at Port Angeles, purchasing a schooner, the J.K. Thorndyke, and setting up a homestead with his childhood friend, William W. Winsor. Both Holmes and Winsor were reportedly over six feet tall, a fact unusual enough to document back then. They had decided to start a trading business shipping fresh halibut to San Francisco and establishing a trade with the Native Americans for goods such as fur, fish and oil.

In 1859, the two men invited another Duxbury native, Captain Alexander Sampson

for a barn where he kept a horse and two cows," noted Graves who was five years old when the firehouse was moved (see photo).

Her grandfather, Rufus Holmes spent his latter years in Duxbury working for a "good friend" Captain D. Winsor.

Generation after generation continued to live in this lovely Cape home on Surplus Street. Rufus and Clara's daughter married Frank Graves. The couple had a daughter named Ruby who was born on September 7th, 1872. Tragedy struck this family when two years later Frank Graves died at the young age of 23. Clara Holmes became a widow with a small child at the age of twenty.

She would later fall in love with Nahum Cushman, and in 1885 marry him. Cushman was a "very kind step-father to me," wrote Ruby Graves in 1958. Tragedy followed again



The South Duxbury Station on South Station Street (c.1900) was the site of Nahum Cushman's accident.

Photo courtesy of Duxbury Rural & Historical Society